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# Individualisation and Fertility

*Jens Ehrhardt & Martin Kohli\**

**Abstract:** »*Individualisierung und Fertilität*«. In this paper, we discuss individualisation theory as a parsimonious framework concept to describe and explain core points of fertility change in Western societies since the end of the 19th century. We emphasise two dimensions of individualisation: firstly, the increase in status of the individual in cultural, social, economic and legal respects (human dignity); secondly, the increase in autonomy and freedom of choice. In contrast to other approaches based on individualisation theory, we do not use the concept of self-realisation in the sense of an increased orientation towards purely individual interests, not least because this concept has failed before the renewed rise in fertility that has recently been observed in some advanced societies.

We discuss the relevance of these two dimensions of individualisation in the context of the first transition and the 1960s with its declining fertility rates. Whereas the first demographic transition can be mainly explained by the rising status of children, which increased the costs of parenting and thus changed the interests of (potential) parents to have children, the transition in the 1960s resulted mainly from the rising status of women in education and the labour market. An important but hitherto neglected change was the increasing divorce rates, as the possibility to dissolve a marriage devalued the traditional gender contract of the breadwinner/housewife model and decreased the willingness of women and men to invest in marriage and children.

The contrast between the recently growing fertility rates in Sweden, France and the US with the continuously low fertility in the German-speaking countries can partly be seen as a result of different divorce regimes. Whereas the first group of countries has limited the entitlement to spousal support through alimonies, the second group has institutionalised extensive entitlements for mothers.

**Keywords:** first demographic transition, second demographic transition, fertility, individualisation, autonomy, human dignity, childhood, divorce, (legal) divorce regimes.

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## 1. Introduction

The growing societal importance and valuation of the individual in terms of personal, cultural, social, economic and legal aspects and the associated expansion of individual decision space are key long-term changes across the modern era, and particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries. This development has permeated all areas of society either directly or indirectly – including the family and fertility. Theories focusing on these individualisation processes therefore have an important contribution to make to demographic theory in general and to the explanation of fertility change in particular (see Hirschman 1994, Huinink 2000).<sup>1</sup>

Speaking of individualisation as an overarching change across modernity does not imply the one universal “grand narrative” that has become the target of much well-founded criticism in historical demography (cf. Szreter 2011, in this volume). Individualisation is a multidimensional term (see Kohli 1988, Luckes 2006, Berger and Hitzler 2010), which, in fertility analyses, can refer to all those concerned – women, men and children – as well as to all the institutional arenas in which they live – from family to education, labour market and welfare state. The term can thus be used as an instrument for developing different perspectives on the subject and for telling different “stories”. Individualisation is primarily a *framework concept* that needs to be defined more specifically, translated from the macro to the micro level, and combined with further arguments and theories.<sup>2</sup> It does not evolve in a linear fashion but through ambivalences, contradictions and conflicts. It does, however, highlight some common features across these domains, providing some welcome theoretical integration in a field at risk of being abandoned to accounts of historical variation or even idiosyncrasy.

Three main aspects of individualisation have been the focus of fertility theories to date. Firstly, *autonomy and freedom of choice*: In the context of the first demographic transition, this primarily concerned the issue of whether the decline in fertility was the expression of a new modern mentality which enabled couples to make their own decisions about the number of offspring they wanted. Whereas, previously, this kind of family planning had been limited by norms and traditions, for example religious ones, so that it approached a state of “natural fertility” (Henry 1961; Wilson, Oeppen, and Pardoe 1988). Research has since shown that family planning has been practised consistently throughout history (Ehmer 2011, in this volume), which means that the concept

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<sup>1</sup> In German sociology similar considerations have been advanced with the term “pluralisation” (e.g. Kaufmann 1995, 96-103). Historical demography has addressed individual emancipation processes and their effects on fertility with respect to gender (see, e.g. Secombe 1992, McDonald 2000, cf. Szreter 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Szoltysek (2007) for a discussion of the term “framework concept” in the context of fertility research.

of “natural fertility” is not appropriate for a break separating a pre-modern from a modern era (Szreter 2011). For the second decline in the birth rate which started in the 1960s the issue is the extent to which marriages ended in divorce. Children were mostly born to married parents at this time and the traditional division of work in line with the *breadwinner/housewife model* depended on a stable marriage. If the increasing divorce rate throws the “contractual” basis of traditional gender roles into question, this must result in a decreasing birth rate (see Davis 1984, 411). This dimension of individualisation – freedom of choice – refers to adults as they decide to continue or not continue their marriage, or to have or not have a (further) child, but not to children themselves as is the case with the other two dimensions.

Secondly, individualisation can be conceptualised as *human dignity*, which in turn comprises various sub-categories, central among them the right to live, equality independent of origins or other characteristics such as religion or gender, and the capability to live a full life within society (*societal participation*).<sup>3</sup> This last principle results in the necessity of increased investments in the upcoming generations, depending on the current historical standard. Today, for example, a certain degree of education is a key prerequisite for societal participation. This is ensured by compulsory schooling, which was fully implemented in European societies at the turn of the 20th century. This issue relates individualisation theories of fertility to those of family economics such as with the cost of parenting (e.g., Folbre 2008, with her “institutional economics of the family”). In an individualisation framework parental investment is not limited to purely financial factors but also includes love and bonding. This aspect of individualisation refers to parents or adults (for example, with the disappearance of formal or informal marriage bans or the emancipation of women) but also to children.

Thirdly, individualisation may also refer to the idea of *individual self-fulfilment* (see Luckes 2006, 66-69), an aspect we will consider here in more detail as it is only mentioned briefly in the rest of this paper in reference to the increase in parental investment since the 1960s. It must be mentioned that the three aspects distinguished here are related to one another and that they represent ideal types. This means that freedom of choice is a prerequisite for self-fulfilment; material (instead of merely formal) freedom of choice is itself not unconditional, but is based on education and the possibility of societal participation (*empowerment*). It is important, however, to distinguish between these dimensions analytically. The wide-spread equation of individualisation with individualism (in the sense of denying all common social values), or even with

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<sup>3</sup> The institutionalisation of the so-called “reproductive rights” in the catalogue of human rights should also be mentioned as a component of human dignity. Through these rights, individuals and couples are granted autonomy with their fertility decisions as against encroachments by population policies.

egoism (in the sense of refusing all social responsibility) is a misconception. Autonomy and freedom of choice mean that actions are conceived on the basis of the individual's interests and values.<sup>4</sup> It is possible to individually opt for commitment, including marriage and remaining with a partner, or for the duties of parenting. While it is true that the institutionalisation of individual autonomy increases the likelihood or risk of diverging from social norms and value traditions, it is also true that decisions made autonomously are more resilient than those made under the pressure of external norms or out of economic imperative (Luhmann 1965).

The difference between autonomy and self-fulfilment may be illustrated through the example of marriage and parenthood. It is often assumed that self-fulfilment goes hand in hand with a lack of commitment and an aversion to long-term responsibility; it follows that marriages would not stabilise because they stand in the path of an individual's ongoing development and thus parenthood would become unlikely. Autonomy on the other hand means that people have the possibility to terminate unsuccessful marriages; however, they can also opt for the continuation of their marriage if this complies with their needs, desires or moral convictions. Autonomy also means that couples are free to decide to live together without having children; but just as well, they can make a decision to have a child or more children together.

Ron Lesthaeghe (2011, in this volume) explains the decline in the birth rate in the 1960s and the low level of fertility since then as being due to an increasing tendency towards "self-realisation" and "self-actualisation" in the sense mentioned above. In his view, this development is what distinguishes it from the first demographic transition which was characterised by higher parental investment and its consequences (Lesthaeghe 1983, Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988). Dirk van de Kaa (1996, 425) neatly summarised this change as "from child-orientedness to self-orientation". According to Lesthaeghe, self-realisation and self-actualisation have increased in importance since the 1960s because of the growing level of prosperity and security as a result of economic growth and the expansion of the welfare state. Through this, material requirements and interests became less important whereas psychological needs became more important. Lesthaeghe bases his argument on Maslow's (1954) theory of the hierarchy of needs according to which the basic needs must be met before psychological needs ("higher order needs", e.g., the need for self-actualisation) can be addressed. He also links his explanation to the work of Ronald Inglehart (e.g. 1977) on value change through the succession of birth cohorts. In his view, because the proportion of people with a traditional mentality is receding and the proportion of people with post-materialist attitudes is increasing, parents are limiting the number of children they choose to have and

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<sup>4</sup> This is explicated in particular detail in the literature on moral development (Kohlberg 1981; Döbert, Habermas, and Nunner-Winkler 1977).

voluntary childlessness is on the rise. In line with this, a high fertility level is seen as the result of traditional values, social conventions and economic imperatives, which have been left behind in a free modern society (Morgan and King 2001, 8-10). Low birth rates look set to remain in the future: "The decline of fertility to below replacement level is an integral part of the Second Demographic Transition" (van de Kaa 2001a, 3486).

Lesthaeghe's and van de Kaa's concepts continue to have wide appeal in sociology and demography, and have given rise to a number of variations. However, there are now several counterarguments to this explanation of the decline in birth rate since the 1960s. The first is that the care and supervision of children can be a form of self-fulfilment in itself (Huinink 2000, 369; see also van de Kaa 2001b). Children are an important medium for reflecting a person's identity and values and for one's self-understanding in terms of origin and future. Such a gain for self-reflection and self-knowledge may compensate for the burdens of caring for and committing to the child as it grows up. Parenthood is a lifelong commitment but the period in which parents are significantly restricted by their children is generally limited to the first few years of a child's life.

Furthermore, from an economic perspective, it may be argued that the increased preference not to have children is the result of increased costs of parenting (e.g. Folbre 2008, 37) and increased insecurity about one's parental investment (see below). In accordance with this argument, the preference would shift again if changes occurred in this respect. Amongst others, Peter McDonald (2000, 2006) has made this point with regards to women: while women today in Western societies have achieved (or successfully fought for) the same access to education and more equality in the world of work, the reality and day-to-day organisation of families and family policy in many societies are still characterised by a strong orientation towards the traditional gender model. This means that women are forced to make a choice between two contradictory spheres, with the consequence that many opt for an employment career and against children and the opportunity costs that children would entail. On the other hand, some societies – for example, France and Sweden – have diminished the career/family conflict for women and encouraged them to reconcile one with the other through relevant infrastructures and on a symbolic level. The higher fertility rates in France and Sweden contradict this understanding of individualisation because one can not say that these two countries are less individualised than Germany or other countries with very low fertility. The finding of Myrskylä, Kohler, and Billari (2009) that across advanced societies fertility is increasing again with rising levels of societal development should also be mentioned here.

And finally, one could find fault with the fact that this argument refutes human nature. From an evolutionary point of view, it must be assumed that most people have a predisposition to reproduce. Although this predisposition varies

in prevalence (Kohler et al. 2006), the theories of evolutionary anthropology and biology oppose the idea that no one or only a few people have a desire to become parents.

These arguments suggest that the significance of the “self-realisation” aspect of individualisation is overestimated in terms of fertility. For this reason, we will now base our discussion of some of the key characteristics and stages in the development of fertility in the 20th century on the two other aspects of individualisation, autonomy and human dignity. What significance do these aspects have, in which ways have they affected fertility and how do they relate to one another?

The following section will examine the first demographic transition, and section 3 and 4 will take a closer look at the second decline in birth rate since the 1960s. The fifth section will address the variation in fertility among countries since the 1970s. This will be followed by a *concluding section*. We will attempt to gain a synthetic perspective, which, by way of necessity, must be selective and limited to illustrating the steps of our argument via some characteristic findings. Some of the findings refer to Germany (and/or Austria and Switzerland), others are comparative across a wider range of Western countries. The comparison is focused on the countries with higher fertility, specifically, France, Sweden and the US. We will not be able to give a full discussion of the empirical evidence here but we hope to do justice to its basic thrust.

## 2. The First Demographic Transition

The first demographic transition is often explained via the rising importance of children and the rising investments of parents in their children. This argument is either embedded in a cultural framework – often with reference to Ariès (1962) – or in an economic framework. In terms of both cultural and material aspects, the increasing inclusion of children in education and the prohibition of child labour play a central role. From the perspective of life course theory, such state interventions were the expression of and part of the generalisation of the bourgeois family model, which defines the stage of childhood as characterised by learning and emotional security and not through gainful employment. John Caldwell (1982) neatly summarised the economic effect of this change: As a result of the prohibition on child labour and the enforcement of compulsory schooling, the intra-familial resource flow between parents and children was reversed. If parents are able to use and exploit the manpower of their children, this means that having children results in a material advantage and a higher interest in having many children. In contrast, if the economic advantage of having children is limited or turns into disadvantage, either as a result of the laws mentioned above, or as a result of structural changes in the labour market (demand for increasingly better qualified workers) or of a new social definition of childhood (through the values of individual development and self-

fulfilment), children become cost factors so that resources flow from parent to child. According to Caldwell, this results in the reduction in the number of children or the avoidance of having children altogether. Family economics (e.g. Becker 1981) and the value-of-children approach (e.g. Nauck 2001) also award this argument central significance.<sup>5</sup>

Caldwell's definition only partly addresses the historical reality of the first demographic transition. This is because even though the contribution of children to the household income was considerable in some regions and social groups, accounting for over 30% of the income in some cases (see e.g. Zelizer 1985, 58 with extensive references for the US; Weissbach 1989 for France), such "lucrative" labour market conditions were the exception; and also because only a minority of children were engaged in gainful employment at the time of the implementation of these reforms. In the 1900 US census, for example, the proportion of children aged between 10 and 15 engaged in employment was only one sixth. This number underestimates their real economic value because it does not take into account the contribution of child labour on family-run farms, but other estimates also prove the generally limited economic significance of child labour at this time. On the basis of a survey of "Paid employment of children in the home as well as in agriculture and its related industries", Boentert (2007, 420-1) reports that in the German Empire in 1904, around one in five schoolchildren (up to the age of 14) had worked in agriculture in the past 12 months; however, more than half of them only worked during the harvest season, i.e. over a relatively short time span. Taking into account children who were employed by other households (7%), children in the service industry (just under 10%), in commercial factory work (less than 1%) and in cottage industries (hard to assess), Boentert (2007, 425) estimates a proportion of primary school children engaged in gainful employment of around 20 to 30%. This proportion is not high enough to explain such a sweeping social change as the first demographic transition. One should also consider that the prohibition of child labour and the full implementation of compulsory schooling for children up to the age of 14 occurred at a time when school at-

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<sup>5</sup> From an economic point of view, it is important to ask whether children, from birth to the time they moved out of the family home, made a positive contribution to the family income in pre-industrial and early industrial society (see Kaplan 1994, Caldwell 2005). This question is difficult to answer empirically. In addition to the age that children started work, the amount of work they performed and their productivity (or the pay they received), other key factors include the time that the young adults left the family home and the levels of resources consumed or contributed by them. Moreover, even if children used more than they contributed financially, it is still possible that they were of instrumental interest to their parents when one considers their key benefit as "insurance" when the parents were no longer able to work, given that modern state provision of health insurance and old-age security only started to be set up at the time of the first demographic transition.



tendance had already achieved high levels in the upper and middle classes as well as in some groups of the working class.<sup>6</sup>

However, the figures on the extent of child labour and its contribution to household income do demonstrate that abolishing it represented a major political intervention with significant material consequences for the part of the population that relied on it. These households had taken from them not only an important source of current income but also the insurance benefit associated with income from several sources.<sup>7</sup> As a result of these reforms parenthood became significantly more expensive for these groups, which changed the basis for making fertility decisions. Similarly, families who already had children were plunged into material insecurity; this was one reason why the reforms could only be implemented after a longwinded, hard-fought process (see Cunningham 1995, 105-6, 157-8) where the age limits were gradually set, the permissible duration of work was lowered and industries in which children were permitted to work were restricted. The increased economic productivity from which the workers could also finally benefit at the turn of the 20th century (see Wehler 1995) was a key requirement for the successful implementation of the reforms (see Basu 1999).

How were these state interventions justified? In her analysis of the American discourse that accompanied the reforms, Zelizer (1985, 66-72) showed that proponents of the reforms based their arguments around the child, the love of the child and the concept of a “sacred childhood”. By comparison, their opponents emphasised parental autonomy (“parental rights”), economic interests, the socialising effect of work, or families’ financial dependence on child labour. In Germany, considerations such as the demand of the economy for qualified workers played a lesser role in public discourse.

In comparison to the protection of the physical, mental and moral development of children, the economic effects of a ban on child labour – whether positive or negative – were simply declared irrelevant. In the parliamentary debates of the 1880s it was not even deemed necessary to mention the reasons for a complete ban on child labour in factories: child labour was simply no longer seen as appropriate (see Boentert 2007, 431).

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<sup>6</sup> After the end of their compulsory schooling, the majority of young people entered into regular work at the age of 15; they then contributed to the household income until they moved out of the family home (see Jessen 1955), and thus limited the costs of parenthood. This only changed in the 1960s with the expansion of education and the subsequent later entry into the labour market. At the same time it became unusual that an apprentice’s salary should be paid to the parents as board (de Regt 2004).

<sup>7</sup> This loss of income was compensated for in part by the increase in women’s employment (see Cunningham 1995, 89). The increase in female employment and the expansion of educational institutions have been used as indicators for the prohibition of child labour and thus for decreasing fertility (see Galloway, Hammel, and Lee 1994, 158).

The newly elevated status of children in the family and in society and its consequences are a key topic of the writings of the *Neo-Malthusians* with their advocacy of birth control. An example is Robert Michels' book on *Sexual Ethics* from 1911. Firstly, Michels points out the cost of having children and thus emphasises the necessity of family planning. Other writings and public statements at this period also highlighted the costs of having children instead of their benefits as a possible source of income (see Neuman 1978).

A limitation of the number of the offspring is essential to the economic equilibrium of the family. [...]. This applies above all to the poorer classes. If the food supply of a household is barely sufficient for four persons, the increase of the family to eight will result in a definite insufficiency of nutriment. [...] Even in those families which are sufficiently well off to be independent of such consideration for the grosser material needs, the parents must not forget the responsibility that they may incur to their children, and to the descendants of these, by a further sub-division of their patrimony (Michels 1911, 160, our translation).

Importantly, Michels supplements the cost argument with normative and affective aspects and moves away from a perspective that focuses only on the parents. The overall view of the various aspects highlights the extent of parental responsibility towards their children: "... to give life to a human being is so serious a matter that the mere thought of the responsibility thus assumed may well be profoundly alarming" (Michels 1911, 159). The gravity of this responsibility may be a reason not to have children at all if one is not able to meet the expectations linked to parenthood (Michels 1911, 167).

Step by step, Michels develops a complex and modern idea of parenting which approaches Kaufmann's concept (1995) of "responsible parenthood". The necessity of limiting the number of offspring is not just a result of the fact that children cause costs and that their basic needs have to be met, or that families with high birth rates have a higher child mortality rate than one-child households. In addition, Michels also points out that "it is evidently far easier to provide a clear-sighted affection and a wisely-conceived and individualised upbringing for two or three children than it is for eight or nine". However, this should not lead to an "overcultivation" or even suppression of the "precious individuality" of the child (Michels 1911, 162).

The enhanced status of the child, its need for love, adequate parental support and for the acknowledgement of its individuality led to a reassessment of the roles in the family. If parental rights or the rights of the father had hitherto been seen as sacrosanct, they were now to be limited in several ways (see also Engel 2010). Not only was the free usability of the child's manpower done away with; the sexuality of the *pater familias* was also to be morally limited. To return to Michels once again:

...it is despicable to bring children into the world without having provided guarantees for their loving reception, and without securing the probability that they will have a tolerable existence. This consideration altogether outweighs

that of the possible diminution of pleasure by the use of preventive measures. No father has the right, in pursuit of increased sexual pleasure, to procreate children for whom he will be unable to provide bread. The brief pleasure will be succeeded by long-enduring pain (Michels 1911, 178).

Good material provision by a husband for his wife and children is a key component of the breadwinner/housewife model of the bourgeois family that became more generalised at the turn of the 20th century. The enhanced status of children and the related increases in their costs made contraception an important prerequisite of this model and turned it into a component of masculine respectability (see Praz 2009; Seccombe 1992).

Changes in the position of women in society also contributed to the limitation of male supremacy and to the changes in couples' fertility strategies. On the one hand, women fought for a life beyond the role of mother and became emancipated from the role of an "engine for procreation" (Gebärmachine) (Michels 1911, 171; Gumpłowicz 1909), which was often ridiculed in the journalism of the era (such as by the satirical magazine *Simplizissimus*). On the other hand, their sexuality and fertility were regulated by the change in the status of the child as well, which made it impossible for female-headed working class households to have families with many children by making use of their manpower (see Janssens 2007, 48).

How do freedom of choice (autonomy) and human dignity (enhanced status of the person) as two aspects of individualisation relate to one another during the first demographic transition? We have argued that the changes in parental interests that resulted from the enhanced status of children necessitated a more intensive and consistent use of contraception. At the same time, and this was also explicated in Michels' writings, the enhanced status of the child legitimised a more intensive approach to family planning and led to a greater degree of autonomy for the couple in its fertility decisions. Speaking of changed interests undermines the contrast between "modern fertility behaviour" and a "natural fertility" regime that was asserted by the *Princeton European Fertility Project* for many years (see Coale and Waktins 1986; Coale 1973, 65) but has since been disproved by historical demography (Szreter 2011).

The enhanced status of the person in general and of the child in particular had various causes. One was the increasing orientation of society towards the here and now; therefore, secular goals such as welfare and quality of life could assume greater importance. Another cause was the diffusion and interpretation of human rights. On a structural level, changes in the employment system and the emergence of modern labour markets that required the existence of and access to free individuals also played a role. Due to the increasing demand for qualifications, higher investments in education became necessary. The individual assumed a higher value and therefore became more worthy of protection; at the same time, this resulted in less productive child labour becoming increasingly superfluous. And finally, the role of the state was important, in the legal

and social implementation of the rights of the individual and the rights of the child as well as in the symbolic policies that celebrated these rights. These factors took effect in different social groups at different times and in different forms; thus, the fact that the decline in fertility during the first demographic transition occurred at different times for different social classes (Kertzer and Hogan 1989; Szreter 1996) can also be reconstructed from the perspective of individualisation theory.

It should again be emphasised that the elevated status of children had an economical and an emotional side. An increasing emotionalisation of parent-child relationships does not mean that these relationships were completely devoid of emotion before the first demographic transition (for a discussion see Becker 2001). Emotions and the bond between parent and child are based in biology (see Hrdy 2000). But these bonds are then anchored with cultural and social values (see Zelizer 1985; Cunningham 1995). Whatever the explanation for the increase in emotionalisation, it is indisputable that this change did occur. Zelizer (1985) speaks of the “sacralisation” of children and childhood. Children also assumed a new utopian potential: By creating “the new person” (*den neuen Menschen*), a very common concept at that time, it was possible to create a new and better society (e.g. Key 1902). In this respect, teachers and mothers could be seen as revolutionary forces.

### 3. The Second Demographic Transition

The 1960s saw a renewed elevation in the status of children, which covered legal as well as economic, social and emotional aspects. Similar to the first demographic transition, the rising amount of time spent in formal education played an important role and led to another increase in the cost of parenting.

The change in West Germany is cited here as an example. The mid-1950s saw the initiation of the debate on educational reform. A key protagonist in this process was the *German Committee for Education*, which was set up as a Federal Commission in 1953 and delivered a large number of recommendations right up to its break-up in 1965. In 1954, for example, it supported the introduction of a ninth compulsory year of schooling at primary level (introduced in 1964), and in 1959 it suggested in its landmark *Outline for the Reorganisation and Standardisation of General Education Schooling* that the streaming of pupils for the three-tier school system should only take place after the sixth year of school. The tone of the reform debate became more heated when Georg Picht, a member of the Committee until 1963, highlighted the “German education crisis” in a series of articles in *Christ und Welt* (1964), which had a great impact on public opinion; one year later, he received the *Theodor-Heuss-Prize* for his contribution to educational policy. Picht primarily supported the modernisation of rural primary school education, which continued to be characterised by single-stage classes (with eight year groups in one class) and separation

along denominational lines; secondly, he wanted to double the number of pupils completing secondary school and thirdly, he supported the proper education of teachers to be able to do this, which entailed the expansion of the universities (Picht 1964, 68).

Parents and their interests played a minor role in Picht's argument, which had mostly a policy focus on financing opportunities, decision-making and organisational structures, Germany's position internationally and the significance of education for the modern economy. Parents' interests are only mentioned once in a short passage:

The educational expectations of pupils and their parents are the same in a village as in a city; our school system therefore penalises the parental rights (*Elternrecht*), so often quoted in other contexts, if it prevents parents from giving their children the education they need for life (Picht 1964, 38).

Ralf Dahrendorf, who made another key contribution to the debate on educational reform with his book *Education Is a Civil Right: the Plea for an Active Educational Policy* (Dahrendorf 1965a), also avoids addressing the material interests of parents. Just like Picht, the possibility of differing economic interests between parents and children are not brought into the equation, although Dahrendorf continually emphasised the significance of material differences in his writings on social inequality (particularly in his critique of Schlesky's social levelling hypothesis). In the context of children and education, this does not appear to play a role; here, Dahrendorf views school and family as competing institutions and parental rights as a vehicle for limiting the influence of public concerns – with negative consequences for the modern democratic way of thinking that children need to develop. Children need school in order to learn “social values” and to become responsible citizens (Dahrendorf 1965b). “Education is a civil right” and so additional costs for the parents resulting from prolonged education (even if the state provides free schooling) should not play a role.

In contrast to the tone of the debate on education reform, the general public was well aware of the costs of having children and providing for their education. In 1958, only 52% of West German survey participants over the age of 18 supported the introduction of a ninth year of compulsory schooling at the primary level; 32% were against it and 16% were undecided. 78% of survey participants said they were against a tenth year of compulsory schooling – mainly for the reason that young people would be too old for an apprenticeship after ten years of compulsory schooling, or that being able to earn anything would be delayed for too long (Institut für Demoskopie 1965, 350).

In the 1950s, education for West Germans was still mainly limited to primary school, with only a minority continuing on to secondary school. According to Schimpl-Neimanns (2000, 651), around 14% of 14 to 18-year olds in 1950 attended secondary school or left school with these qualifications; in 1960 this figure was 23%, and in 1970, 35%. The proportion of young people going

on to university also increased significantly in this period. While the proportion of 22-year-olds going on to university was around 2% in 1952, it rose to around 6% by 1966, and after a short temporary decline, doubled by 1973.

Both men and women benefited from this development; however, the gap between the sexes was only really closed in the late 1990s (Lundgreen 2008, 89). In addition to the change in proportions of men and women in education, the rural/urban ratio also changed significantly; rural areas with weaker infrastructure saw a rapid development and thus regional imbalances began to equalise (e.g. *Wirtschaft und Statistik* 1970, 597-8).

The expansion of education led to a major cultural change for society and for families, and a change in conditions for fertility decisions. The rising costs as a result of the increased proportion of children going on to secondary school were partially offset by the increases in household income; however, the rise in the cost of education could be very high in families with many children because of the rising acceptance of the norm of equality, which meant that parents increasingly treated sons and daughters the same way, and that adopting different strategies of investment in children depending on birth order became less and less legitimate.

It should be added that the educational expansion also influenced fertility via other mechanisms such as the increased age of couples at the time of marriage (Blossfeld and Huinink 1991).

In addition to education, the status of the child was also elevated by the re-definition of its legal position. Triggered by the 1959 UN *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, several rulings by the German Federal Constitutional Court played a key role – particularly the rulings on adoption law and on the legal position of children born out of wedlock. These rulings gave children more independence from their parents, with parental authority being increasingly limited by the well-being of the child. In the ruling on “parental authority” in 1959 (BVerfGE 10, 59; 29 July 1959), which put mothers and fathers on equal terms with regard to their authority in raising children, “paternal authority was declared no longer a right to rule but a right that came with responsibility, a social right which is linked to the duty to ensure the well-being of the child” (BVerfGE 10, 59). In its ruling on the revision of the adoption procedure (BVerfGE 24, 119; 29 July 1968), the Constitutional Court clarified that the issue of a disturbance of family life could not only be assessed from the parent’s point of view because “the child also belongs to the family” (BVerfGE 24, 119). Parents have the right

to care for and raise their children however they wish [...]. However, the protection of this fundamental right may only be considered for actions that could be evaluated as in the interests of the well-being and education of the child, and not the opposite: the neglect of the child. (BVerfGE 24, 119).

The state itself is therefore

not only authorised but obliged to ensure the well-being and education of the child. This obligation of the state does not arise from the legitimate interest of the social community in the education of younger generations [...] or from the general point of view of public policy; it is primarily because the child is also entitled to basic rights and thus has a claim to the protection of the state. The child is a person with his/her own dignity and his/her own right to the development of an individual personality [...] (BVerfGE 24, 119).

These new rulings redefined the position of children born out of wedlock (BVerfGE 25, 167; 29 January 1969) just as foster homes were being reformed and humanised. The threat “If you misbehave, we’ll send you to a home”, which was carried out frequently still in the 1950s and 1960s, lost its power to frighten and finally disappeared altogether (Köster 2003; Wensierski 2006).

Parent/child relationships not only became less hierarchical in the 1960s (see Horkheimer 1936 for a critique of the German family in the 1930s), parents also developed new educational objectives and styles. In addition to the traditional virtues of tidiness, hard work and cleanliness, new individualised goals were adopted that focussed on the autonomy and responsibility of the child (cf. Alwin 1989).

The emotionalisation of the parent/child relationship also continued to intensify (Spree 1992). It had emerged during the first demographic transition (see above), but took on new forms under the growing influence of developmental psychology (e.g. Bowlby 1953). This attracted more attention to the vulnerability of the child and the possibility of lasting psychological repercussions. Parenthood that supplied a continual flow of parental love and material resources was now seen as a prerequisite for good child development.

#### 4. Divorce and Fertility Decline in the 1960s

Increased costs of parenting are a major consequence of individualisation in terms of the elevated status of the child. Their influence on fertility has been widely discussed in the demographic literature – starting with the groundbreaking work on the economics of the family by Gary Becker (1981). Another aspect of individualisation is the improved status of women. This has also been well-documented, be it at the economic and social micro level with reference to the opportunity costs of motherhood, which are increasing with women’s increasing formal education; or at the macro level with reference to the varying speed of progress towards equality in the different institutional fields and the dilemma that arises for women who decide to have children (McDonald 2000, 2006). A further consequence of individualisation has been neglected thus far in fertility research, however, and that is the increasing frequency of divorce. We will take a closer look at this aspect here.

In West Germany, the divorce rate increased rapidly from the mid-1960s and stabilised in the 1980s at a high level, with temporary fluctuations as the

result of specific legal changes or of economic downturns.<sup>8</sup> A similar development could be observed in Austria and Switzerland and in most other developed Western societies. However, there are also significant differences between these countries, for example, the particularly high divorce rates in the US and Sweden and the considerable delay to development in southern Europe and Ireland as a result of the influence of the Catholic Church.

In the course of the surge of individualisation in the 1960s, larger and larger population groups became emancipated from the hitherto restrictive marriage laws that limited divorce, thus enforcing law reforms in the subsequent years. These reforms were, in some respects, catching up on earlier developments (the sudden rapid increase in divorce rates and the subsequent stabilisation is an indicator of the slow pace of reforms up to that point): For one thing, the first ‘modern’ divorce law was adopted in 1792 during the time of the French Revolution (it remained in force until 1815, see Desan 2004); there was also a liberalisation of marriage law in Sweden in 1915, which was adopted in similar forms by the other Scandinavian countries. And for another thing, the concept concerned the transfer of a “basic structural principle” of modern societies to the area of the family, which, up to that point, had been subjected to completely different regulations. In the domains of company and labour law, associations have been characterised by a (relatively) straightforward “exit right” since the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>9</sup> The claim that this could also apply to marriage suggested itself but was in conflict with the traditional legal and social concept of marriage as a lifelong bond. The idea of a freer and more individual model for marriage had already been developed much earlier but it was only in the 1960s that it could replace the conservative model in social and legal terms.

Within a few years, the previously widespread concept of an “unbreakable lifelong bond” had been replaced by a partnership with an exit clause. Since this change, no one now has the certainty that their marriage will last until either their own death or that of their spouse. Research into the causes of divorce has been able to identify specific risk factors (see e.g. Wagner 1997;

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<sup>8</sup> In 1965 there were 1.1 divorces per 1,000 inhabitants in West Germany, in 1985 there were 2.3 (German Federal Statistical Office). 10% of the marriages established in 1950 were divorced in the following 25 years; this figure increases to 32% for the marriage cohort of 1980.

<sup>9</sup> “Negative freedom of association” is a fundamental right and is protected in Germany by Article 9 of the constitution. The freedom to found an organisation is inseparable from the freedom to leave or not to join an organisation. Transferring this principle to marriage is limited in Germany insofar as the spouses’ freedom of contract (in the marriage contract) is restricted (see Braeuer 2003), and exiting the marriage via divorce has significant legal and financial consequences. If one follows the argument of Hirschman (1974) and transfers it to marriage, it may be the case that the exit option has increased the quality of marriage. Thus, the observation of Nave-Herz (1990) that higher demands on marriages have led to an increase in the divorce rate only refers to one direction of the causal relationship between the two parameters.



Klein and Kopp 1999; Wagner and Weiss 2003), but it cannot be said that the risk of divorce is limited to a few “problem groups”.

How are divorce and fertility related? At the macro level, i.e. aggregate national rates over a period of time, most countries initially show a highly negative correlation with curves that are almost mirror images of one another. However, the relationship of both parameters differentiates itself in the subsequent period (see also Billari and Kohler 2004, 163). While fertility rates went up again in France, Sweden and the US after some time, which seems to indicate that the negative effect of divorce on fertility has declined over the course of time and finally disappeared, divorce in Germany, Austria and Switzerland continues to have a negative effect on fertility; the high divorce level and the low fertility level are stabilising in these countries, in other words, fertility behaviour is not adapting to the new conditions.

At the micro level, three different effects of divorce on fertility have been discussed. The first is the lower fertility after a divorce (as documented by research into the *consequences of divorce*). This effect can be partially attributed to the lack of a partner or the necessary time for establishing a new partnership, and partially to the lower fertility of second marriages, which is mainly due to the higher age of divorced women (see Klein and Eckhard 2004; Jansen, Wijckmans and van Bavel 2001). Some sub-groups of people remarrying have the opportunity to have an above-average number of children but in general second marriages are associated with lower fertility rates.

The second option for examining this relationship is by looking at *research on marriages and couple relationships*. As shown by Thornton (1978), for example, fertility decreases within a partnership even before the divorce because the quality of marital interaction has a positive influence on fertility (see also Brüderl et al. 2003) and because reproductive behaviour is influenced by the perceived individual risk of divorce. For the US from 1980 to 1992, Myers (1997, 1281) demonstrated that the perceived risk of divorce particularly reduced the likelihood of having second and third children, while the transition to the first child was not so negatively influenced. This confirmed the results of Lillard and Waite (1993) for the US before 1985. Rijken and Liefbroer (2009) show with data from the *Panel Study on Social Integration in the Netherlands* (1987, 1991, 1995) that negatively evaluated interactions between spouses significantly lower the likelihood of the birth of a child.

Thirdly, one can discuss the correlation between divorce and fertility by assuming a *general anticipatory perspective towards divorce*. This means that the relationship quality in a specific marriage and the risk associated with it is less of an impact factor than a general awareness of risk. To adapt one's actions to perceived risks is surely a well-founded concern in respect of the high investments required by marriage and parenthood. Initially, the awareness of risk related to the provision of financial support for spouses:

The exploding divorce rate struck at the heart of the nineteenth century sex role system. If a young wife could not count on her husband's remaining married to her, she could not count on his support either. Divorce thus broke the central bargain of marriage by which a woman traded her services as wife and mother for financial support of the husband (Davis 1984, 411).

Now the awareness of risk also applies to parenthood. Stevenson (2007) and Drewianka (2008) showed that the states in the US that have the option of "unilateral exit" demonstrate a negative (if only small) anticipation effect on fertility; according to these studies, the regulation of the division of conjugal property also leads to small differences in reproductive behaviour.

If the risks of divorce are higher for women in general, and particularly as a result of specific aspects of divorce law, this not only lowers fertility but at the same time raises women's labour market orientation (Stevenson 2007, 2008). This is hardly surprising: research into the consequences of divorce has confirmed Davis's (1984) view on the disintegration of the traditional gender contract and has shown that women incur heavy financial losses after a divorce if they have occupied the role of housewife in a traditional gender arrangement and were not employed (see e.g. Petersen 1996; Andress 2003; Andress 2009). In this respect, it is safe to assume with Diekmann (1994) that the anticipation of an increased risk of divorce has resulted in higher levels of women in employment (see also BMFSFJ 2005, 218).<sup>10</sup>

This adaptive behaviour is confirmed by the results of the *research on the (temporal) process of divorce* (cf. Herzer 1998). Johnson and Skinner (1986) observed the employment patterns of married couples from 1969 to 1977 using the data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). They were able to show that female labour force participation increases significantly before a divorce: Three years before the divorce, the proportion of married women in employment was 67%; it then increased to 71% (two years) and 76% (one year), to reach the 85% mark in the year of the divorce (Johnson and Skinner 1986, 457). Multivariate analyses show that the risk of divorce has particularly increased the employment rate of white women with little previous labour market experience (see also Greene and Quester 1982).

In comparison to these early studies, where the risk of divorce was estimated indirectly through socio-structural parameters, the subjective perception of the risk of divorce was directly assessed in the studies by South, Bose and Trent (2004) for the US, and by Beck and Hartmann (1999) for Germany. South, Bose and Trent (2004, 14) reported a significant increase in the number of working hours for women who considered divorce a possibility in their marriage (only those partnerships that still existed at the time of the second survey

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<sup>10</sup> In order to determine the influence of women's employment or of fertility on divorce, the effects in the other causal direction must also be considered (Beck and Hartmann 1999). This also applies to the influence of women's employment on fertility.

were included in the analysis). If the female respondents estimated the risk as “low” but possible, they showed a significant increase in the number of working hours over those who considered their marriage at “very low” risk of divorce. Beck and Hartmann (1999, 668) show that, in West Germany (but not in East Germany), “suggesting a divorce” or “thinking of marriage difficulties” significantly increased women’s transition into employment.

The increase in divorce rates therefore contributes to the explanation of the fertility decline the 1960s and 1970s. On the basis of the three approaches outlined (research into consequences of divorce, into marriages and couple relationships, and into anticipation of the general risk of divorce), we may assume an opposite trend as well: that fertility decreases less severely after a divorce because the status of being ‘divorced’ is no longer stigmatised and an active marriage market for second marriages or partnerships has evolved. It also seems to be true that the social normalisation of divorce should lessen the intensity of divorce conflicts between the (ex-)spouses. Research on couple relationships and on the divorce process has documented such adaptation processes and a decrease in the severity of effects. If the stigmatisation effect decreases, spouses will file for divorce more quickly if a marriage is compromised (and thus increase their chances of remarriage); simplified legal procedures should reduce waiting times in divorce proceedings so that less time is lost and a new partnership may be formed more quickly. Finally, from the anticipatory perspective, we may assume an adaptation process and a reduction in the negative effect of divorce on fertility if women are made less vulnerable to divorce through higher employment integration. As a result, men are subjected to less of a financial burden after a divorce.

Female labour force participation has increased dramatically in Europe and the US in the past four decades. In 1970, it amounted to between 45 and 50% for women between the ages of 24 to 55 in West Germany and France (*OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics*); by 2008 it had increased to around 75% (similar for Austria). In Sweden and the US, these proportions are higher; however, the difference to West Germany declined from around 15 to 20 percentage points in 1970 to around 10 percentage points in 2008.

With regard to the proportion of women in part-time employment, however, there continue to be significant differences between countries. Countries with low fertility rates such as Germany and Austria have seen the proportion of part-time workers increase since 1980, while the countries with higher fertility have seen it decrease (Sweden) or stay the same (France). Part-time work (up to 29 hours/week) accounts for 30 to 40% of employed women in Germany and Austria; while in Sweden the proportion is only around 15%, and in France, around 20% (*OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics*). The increase in women’s employment in the past few decades has therefore taken different forms (see e.g. Grunow, Hofmeister and Buchholz 2006; BMFSFJ 2005, 51; Drobnic, Blossfeld and Rohwer 1999).

If we compare Sweden and France with Germany and Austria, we may conclude that the lower labour market integration of women in the second two countries is a reflection on the difficulty of reconciling work and motherhood, as Sweden and France both have well-developed and easy-to-access public provision of childcare. The US, however, does not fit this pattern because childcare there is almost exclusively private or commercial as a result of the almost complete lack of any public provision. In order to explain why fertility levels remain high in the US despite this, it is necessary to take into account the conditions on the American labour market (Preston and Hartnett 2008): on the one hand, there is a large low-wage sector, which makes market-based childcare more affordable; on the other hand, it is easier to re-enter or step up employment after taking a break to look after children. There are also cultural differences, in particular the stronger religious orientation of American society. A further dimension of cultural differences is represented by the strength of traditional gender roles (see e.g. Grunow, Hofmeister and Buchholz 2006, 122).<sup>11</sup> This can be seen in the attitudes towards working mothers. In 2000, two thirds of western German 30 to 40-year-olds agreed with the statement that “a young child [...] would definitely suffer if his/her mother is employed” (Kreyenfeld 2002). Part-time work can therefore be seen as a *partial modernisation* which allows women to fulfil the perceived emotional demands of a child and also the traditional female gender role. However, this comes with the price of lower protection against the financial risks of divorce.

## 5. The Regulation of Divorce Consequences

Regarding the legal preconditions for exit from marriage – that is, the introduction of *unilateral divorce* or moving away from the *principle of consensus*, and the replacement of the *at-fault principle* with the *principle of marriage breakdown* (see e.g. Limbach and Willutzi 2002) – there are no longer any major differences between the high and low fertility countries mentioned (see the overview in Kneip and Bauer 2009, 594) that could be used to explain differences in reproductive behaviour. The two groups of countries differ greatly; however, when it comes to the legal consequences of divorce, in line with the findings presented above (see, in particular, Glendon 1989; Verschraegen 2007; Hofer 2003). Until now, this has generally not been addressed outside the sphere of comparative legal studies. While marital solidarity is mostly limited to the duration of the marriage in France, Sweden and the US, this is not the case in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Since the early/mid-1970s, alimony payments after a divorce are usually only guaranteed for a short period and at a

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<sup>11</sup> Although this argument is often cited, there have only been a few attempts to describe these types sufficiently from an ethnographic point of view (Schütze 1986, Vinken 2007).

low level in the first group of countries; by contrast, in the second group of countries there are legal claims and obligations to provide between the spouses after a divorce which are usually valid for life – except in the case of remarriage.<sup>12</sup>

How are the two different divorce regimes linked to the different developments in fertility in the two groups of countries? How can the diminished rights for financial support of women in the first group of countries, which may be seen as unfavourable towards women, be reasoned as being to their advantage in the long term and a factor that promotes fertility?

In our view, this change has four effects. The *first* concerns women's employment. In the first group of countries (France, Sweden, the US), women with a traditional role (i.e., not employed) have to bear significantly higher costs of divorce than women who are in the labour force; as a result of this risk, this lifestyle is increasingly rare or is only chosen for a limited period. Even women with conservative attitudes are likely to seek employment in order to be able to provide for themselves, so that most women in this group of countries are less vulnerable should divorce occur. This may be seen as a behavioural adaptation that takes into account the increased risk of divorce. The second group of countries does not present such a clear incentive for a change in behaviour, even though it is frequently impossible to secure a traditional lifestyle after a divorce through alimony payments alone, because the economies of scale associated with a shared household no longer apply and the salary of the male breadwinner is too low to fully support two independent households (Andress 2003, 2009; Berghahn 2007).<sup>13</sup>

The *second* effect of the divorce regime (as the flipside of the motivation for employment) relates to the vitality of the traditional role of the housewife. Social ideas must have a payout (Lepsius 1986) and institutions depend on resources to maintain their validity. While the traditional role of housewife has

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<sup>12</sup> In Germany, the law on alimony payments was changed on 1 January 2008. For all new divorce cases occurring after this date, the period of payment has now also been limited and the recipient's obligation to gainful work strengthened (see § 1569 German Civil Code [BGB]: Principle of personal responsibility [Grundsatz der Eigenverantwortung]). A central feature of the previous child support law was known as the "age-grade regulation" (Altersgruppenregelung): The courts would set "age grades according to which a child from the age of eight to ten requires personal full-time childcare and therefore assumes no duty of the parent providing childcare to work. Up to this age, child support must be paid in full. After this point, partial employment is expected, the income of which can be added to the child support payments. Only when the child reaches the age of 16 does the expectation of the parent to return to work come into force in full and the claim to child support generally expires" (BVerfG 118, 45, 28 February 2007).

<sup>13</sup> In Switzerland there is currently a political debate on how to distribute the resultant risk in cases below the poverty line or social assistance level. While the current regulation puts the risk squarely on the non-earning or lower-earning partner, the minister in charge now proposes to split the risk equally between both partners. This has already resulted in protest from men's rights organisations.

been consistently devalued or “modernised” in the first group of countries, this has not been the case in the second group where women from the upper middle and upper classes are protected against the financial risks of divorce.<sup>14</sup> To the extent that this social class embodies and establishes the core values for the rest of society, the traditional role of housewife is still valid here. Childcare at public institutions is seen as damaging and therefore its provision has been neglected.

On a *symbolic level* one can see the divorce regime in the more modern group of countries (France, Sweden, US) as a certain familial reduction in status for children because fewer family resources are invested in them if mothers pursue a career and most of the childcare is left to a crèche or kindergarten. On the one hand, the ‘production’ of children is cheaper for these families because the opportunity costs for mothers are lower and the household income is higher (which reduces the relative cost of having children); on the other hand, the behaviour of women is no longer fully focused on her children who are now in competition with her career goals. In its recent ruling on child support, the German Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) avoided the use of the term “devaluation” and spoke instead of a reconciliation of interests that had become possible because educational research had shown the attendance of crèche and kindergarten as being beneficial to a child’s development: this new regulation with external childcare at a kindergarten and the early return to gainful work for the parent providing childcare has “taken into account not only the parent providing childcare but also the parent responsible for child support, as well as the child, and reconciled these interests with one another” (BVerG 118, 45, 28 February 2007).

The *third* effect of the divorce regime concerns the coherence of state policy. The divorce regime of the more modern group of countries can be seen as the expression and cornerstone of a consistent overall policy direction which has a regulatory effect on labour market and social policy. While policies pursue a clear goal in these countries – the integration of women into the labour market – they remain ambivalent in the second group.

The *fourth* effect concerns men. Divorce not only threatens the interests of women but of men as well. As is the case for women, this is related to the definition of action spaces in terms of traditional gender roles, whereby the woman takes care of the household and raises the children while the man goes to work (e.g. Hausen 1976). Divorce renders this division of roles obsolete: women lack access to the labour market, and men lack access to their children.

Although children are, economically speaking, for most people the most expensive investments (see BMFSFJ 1994, 145) and, psychologically speaking, the most meaningful investments in their lives, there is little information about

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<sup>14</sup> According to Weitzmann (1992), the US child support reforms of the 1970s targeted this group.

how frequently parent/child contact breaks down after a divorce (usually contact to the father). In this respect, men are again the neglected gender in family research (as stated by Tölke and Hank 2005, who do not address this point). According to Hartl (2002), around 50% of West German and around 70% of East German fathers have no or only irregular contact with their children after a divorce (less than at least one contact per month, see also Tazi-Preve 2007). Sometimes it is assumed that men break off contact with their children because they are not able to engage with them without their wife (e.g. Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991, 26, who speak of a “package deal”). Given the high value of children it is more plausible that women act as ‘gatekeepers’ when it comes to regulating contact (see BMFSFJ 2005, 207), preventing their ex-husbands from seeing their children, or even using them as a weapon in the divorce conflict. In countries with a higher labour force participation (France, Sweden and the US, women have fewer incentives to deny their ex-husbands access to their children because their social status does not just come from the fact that they have children (and from other attributes of the housewife role) but also from their own occupational career. In line with this assertion, the proportion of parents in the US breaking off contact with their children has decreased significantly over time (Amato, Meyers and Emery 2009, 47). In Sweden, divorce conflicts occur only rarely (Hobson and Morgan 2002).

With this background, we may ask whether the strength of women and the weakness of men in terms of parent/child contact after a divorce is a reason why the desire for children is lower in men than in women (see Dobritz 2008, 583). For investments to be made, there must be the expectation that they will pay out. This does not just apply to companies but also to families. Fertility decisions are decisions made jointly by women and men (Klein 2003); therefore the risk for fathers of losing the contact with their children after divorce also contributes to the fertility level of a society.

## 6. Conclusion

Fertility is affected by a wide range of factors, and accordingly, theories of fertility have been developed in several scientific disciplines which examine the issue from different perspectives. Specific theories have therefore only limited scope. Despite this necessary plurality of approaches, we assume that it is possible, using individualisation theory as a parsimonious *framework concept*, to understand and explain many of the core points of fertility change in Western societies since the end of the 19th century. In doing so, we emphasise two dimensions of individualisation: firstly, the increase in status of the individual – initially of the child, and then also of women – in cultural, social, economic and legal respects; secondly, the increase in autonomy and freedom of choice. In contrast to other approaches based on individualisation theory, we do not use the concept of self-realisation in the sense of an increased orienta-

tion towards purely individual interests, not least because this concept has failed before the renewed rise in fertility that has recently been observed in some advanced societies.

Like many other authors, we have argued that the first fertility decline was a result of the rapid increase in the status of children, which increased the costs of parenting and thus changed the interests of (potential) parents. Because contraception and family planning were already practised before the first demographic transition, as shown by historical demography, this development merely entailed a more intensive and rational use of these practices. In this sense, the increasing autonomy and freedom of choice was less significant than the rise in status of the child.

This simple relationship was also influenced by other factors which may have accelerated or delayed the transition to families with fewer children. Our approach therefore does not claim to explain the full variation in fertility by itself. It should rather be seen as a framework concept that reconstructs the basic changes but must be supplemented by further parameters such as religion, labour market structure or the incipient interventions of the welfare state.

In the second fertility decline since the 1960s, the two dimensions of individualisation had a different causal relationship. As a result of the rapid rises in income, the increased direct costs of having children that resulted from the educational expansion played a less important role for families. In addition to the higher status of the child, the improvement in the status of women and their increasing participation in the educational system were also of major importance. With regard to the dimension of autonomy and freedom of choice, which we see as highly significant for the fertility decline, the new possibility of being able to dissolve a marriage devalued the traditional gender contract of the breadwinner/housewife model, which had an impact on the willingness of women and men to invest in marriage and children.

As outlined above, Western societies took different paths in the 1970s in terms of the legal regulation of the consequences of divorce. While the Scandinavian countries, France and the US strictly limited the entitlements to child support through alimonies, the German-speaking countries institutionalised extensive entitlements for the mother and child in the divorce laws and thus emphasised the significance of the mother-child dyad. This decision led to a dead-end in many respects; the revision of the divorce regime in Germany through the Federal Constitutional Court and through the new law on alimony after divorce has (for the time being) ended this 30-year special path.

From the point of view of these reforms, of women's increasing labour market orientation and of the incipient labour shortage resulting from the low fertility rates of previous decades, the German-speaking countries look set to follow the course of Sweden, France and the US in the coming years. High divorce rates can go along with high fertility rates if the costs of divorce are low to both men and women. This requires economically independent actors or, in other



words, a higher integration of women into the labour market. On the other hand, the other side of the traditional gender model must also change and men must be secured access to their children in order to make them ready to invest in parenthood. As suggested by the developments in Sweden, France and the US, these two aspects can go hand in hand if the traditional role of housewife assumes a lower significance.

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